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EXTRACT OF A LETTER

ON

EARLY INSTRUCTION,

PARTICULARLY THAT OF

THE POOR.

On the beſt method to teach Reading and Writing.—Idea of a Book proper for this purpoſe.—Of the care that ſhould be taken to improve our early benevolent ſenſations into fixed principles of action.—Of the urgent neceſſity of humanizing the minds of the poorer claſs of Citizens.—Inevitable conſequences of a ferocious ſpirit in them.—Cautions reſpecting religious inſtruction.—Exceſſive danger of ſtrongly attaching to the dogmas of any ſect, the minds of thoſe who cannot examine the grounds on which they reſt.

MADAM,

——YOU muſt have obſerved how exceedingly tireſome the firſt advances in reading and writing always prove. Perhaps the moſt admired of his ſubſequent attainments does not coſt the philoſopher more pains: univerſal experience, we find, has ſuggeſted an hundred expedients for diminiſhing the difficulty: and ſurely humanity not leſs than good policy enjoins us to ſearch for the eaſieſt method of diſſeminating arts, which have enabled human reaſon to ſoar ſo high and which by judicious management, may equally exalt the virtue and happineſs of nations.

In

In all education, our earlieſt care muſt be to beſtow that quickneſs of ſight and apprehenſion, in which ready reading conſiſts. Is it indifferent what books are uſed for this purpoſe? In our momentary converſation you were perhaps ſurprized to hear me lay ſo much ſtreſs upon a proper choice of books. But I flatter myſelf that when you have conſidered my reaſons, you will adopt my ſentiments. If we confine our views to the immediate effect only, we ſhall aſſuredly ſave much time, and a great deal of irkſome labour; a very ſimple conſideration will I imagine, impreſs you ſtrongly with the juſtneſs of this obſervation. Suppoſe for inſtance we ſhould attempt to teach reading by means of a latin book. The letters will be the ſame: the method of ſpelling ſimilar. Only the learner would not meet with a ſingle word to excite an idea in his mind. His progreſs, you ſee, would be exceſſively toilſome; nor would there be a ſingle circumſtance to afford him encouragement. If therefore it be moſt difficult and diſguſting to learn from a book which preſents to the underſtanding one univerſal blank, I infer that it would be moſt eaſy and pleaſant to learn from a book in which he could comprehend every thing, or could be made by a little explanation either given by the maſter, or judiciouſly inſerted in the context, to comprehend every thing.

What kind of a book then would be beſt adapted to the capacity of a child? This will be eaſily diſcovered. The ſoul of a child, to borrow an expreſſion from the French legiſlators, eſſentially reſides in his ſenſes. It would be extremely injudicious to make a premature attempt to force into his head any ideas, not immediately ariſing from this ſource, unleſs perhaps a very few intimately connected with them. We ſhall be led, I think, by the train of our reflections to eaſy means of aſſiſting him in the acquiſition of ſuch ideas without making him feel that he is under any extraneous influence. And the greater number he acquires of ſuch ideas, the better, provided you can engage him to dwell long enough upon each to fix it firmly and diſtinctly in his mind. We ſhall thus inſenſibly form the talent for obſervation; a talent which conſtitutes ſo large a portion of the difference between different individuals; for I cannot ſuppoſe that thoſe who have a ſtrong tendency to collect theſe materials of genuine knowledge will

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will be backward to combine and arrange them. Thus you ſee though I did not either profeſs or deſign to trace the conſequences of an education that ſets out on rational principles, how ſoon and how unavoidably I am led to one of the utmoſt importance. Indeed I am perſuaded that you will trace out, by a little reflection, conſequences far more numerous and beneficial than are commonly apprehended. In the mean time I may extend to general maxims, the remark I have already made upon all ideas which the ſpontaneous exerciſe of the ſenſes does not impreſs. They are not merely unintereſting, they are altogether loathſome to children. We may obſerve them any day juſt as much diſguſted by the Moral as they are engaged by the Narrative of a fable. General inferences can, in truth, never be either grateful or inſtructive to a mind unfurniſhed with the knowledge of particulars and not yet ripe for ſuch combinations. This then is one of my reaſons for believing that thoſe pious ejaculations which compoſe ſo much of READING-MADE-EASY are ill adapted to children, Will you ſuſpect me of refining too much, when I add that they may eaſily produce poſitively bad effects; and this in more than one way, beyond merely throwing an impediment in the road of inſtruction: that they can have no good effect, is certain. Can merely making a child repeat in ſo many words, that GOD IS GOOD, THAT GOD IS WORTHY TO BE PRAISED, GOD IS LOVE, GOD IS MY HIDING PLACE AND MY SHIELD, GOD IS LIGHT, &c. for ſuch is the perpetual burden of the ſong, impreſs him with a proper internal conviction of ſuch truths? Impoſſible! they muſt be proved to him at a maturer age by examples, and not by injunctions.

Has it ever been found that juſt notions concerning the perfections of the Deity have been entertained and correſpondent practices adopted by any nation or any individual, merely becauſe they were commanded to believe ſo and ſo? I cannot imagine a more egregious folly than to conſider the unity and attributes of God as objects of precept. Convince the idolater and he will forſake his Images. Inſtruct him and he will worſhip ONE GOD in ſpirit and in truth. I think every one who attends to his own feelings muſt be perſuaded that he believes not what he will but what he muſt. Human victims indeed without

without number have been ſacrificed to the contrary abſurd ſuppoſition; but this happened becauſe the unthinking were told that they believed what they could currently repeat, but very faintly imagine, and did not at all underſtand. Now one of the ill conſequences to which I am ſoliciting your attention is this; I conceive that the habit in the CHILD of hearing and pronouncing certain ſounds without any movement of the mind, will diſpoſe the MAN to hear the ſame ſounds with the ſame vacancy of thought. Your piety will incline you to liſten to this objection; and when I conſider the neceſſity of a clear apprehenſion to a ſound judgment, the ſame objection ſtrikes me under another form. Will not children long uſed to inſignificant ſounds become careleſs of the meaning of words? and will they not acquire an indiſtinctneſs of conception and dimneſs of underſtanding; and, loſing that timidity, which is the ſafeguard of conſcious ignorance, be prepared by a perverſe education to ſpeak and act at random. Thus perhaps thoſe who love to talk of what they do not comprehend, may ſome of them be indebted to their READING-MADE-EASY for this troubleſome talent.

I hope I have ſaid enough to decide your opinion of a Book ſtill put into the hands of almoſt all poor Children. I will therefore endeavour to ſketch a better.

Letters without doubt, the component parts of words muſt be learned firſt, and then words, the component parts of ſentences. And even here in ſo ſimple a buſineſs as teaching the alphabet the common method is not perhaps incapable of improvement. In order to ſave time and trouble a very ingenious French Writer propoſes to teach writing and reading at the ſame time. Poor children, I believe, are ſeldom ſent to ſchool very early; and his ſcheme, on this account, ſtands the beſt chance of anſwering with them. He propoſes to make uſe of printed copies of an eaſy round writing hand, and he thinks that the action of imitating the letters as they become ſucceſſively acquainted with them, would prove a ſource of amuſement and very ſoon confer the power of diſtinguiſhing them quickly. We ought to place the printing character beſide the written on our copies, as, A *A*, a *a*, &c.

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In order to attain a familiarity with combinations of letters, ſuch words ſhould be ſelected as a child can underſtand. To theſe ſhould be added ſuch others as it may be uſeful to make him acquainted with. By theſe I mean ſuch as will quicken his curioſity and induce him to look with a more ſteady attention on the objects around him. This idea ſhould be carefully carried on through every ſtage of inſtruction. In the Fourth part of Mrs. Barbauld's Leſſons, from page 72, to the end it is executed with great ſucceſs in the explanation of ſuch terms as "web-footed, cloven-hoofed, quadrupeds," and others expreſſive of natural appearances.

A ſet of extremely ſimple phraſes ſhould next be preſented to the young pupil. Theſe ſhould relate to the common occurrences of life; they ſhould expreſs the obſervations he may have made himſelf and the judgments he may have been likely to form in conſequence. He will be delighted with the image of his mind thus reflected! and his perceptions will become clearer as he contemplates them in the faithful mirror of expreſſive language. Such phraſes as the following will exemplify my meaning: "Your face is not clean. Boys ſhould keep their "faces clean. When the great dog goes by, the hen calls her "chickens and ſhelters them under her wings: then how ſhe "chuckles and looks as if ſhe would fly at the great dog: poor "little things! it is well ſhe takes ſuch care of them: they "could not take care of themſelves." Here too Mrs. Barbauld has large claims upon the gratitude of parents and children. If her book of ſentences can be improved, it would perhaps be by altering her imperatives into optatives. I prefer this as the more gentle mood. Perhaps alſo ſhe might oftener have inſinuated a moral judgment by a well choſen epithet.

Our collection of phraſes ſhould be ſucceeded by ſhort ſtories, calculated to fix attention upon thoſe ſentiments that ariſe earlieſt and ofteneſt in the mind. Here I really know not which to admire moſt—the fair opening offered by nature for eſtabliſhing good impreſſions and preparing the mind for benevolent principles of action, or our long ſubmiſſion to the eſtabliſhed abſurdities of education. Nature has made us very early ſenſible to kindneſs; a fact, I ſuppoſe nobody will diſpute, who has ever ſeen an infant ſmile upon its mother, or ſtretch out its arms towards its nurſe. We are pleaſed with thoſe that give

give us pleaſure.—Such is the mechaniſm of human nature at all ages; and it may eaſily be matured into an habitual affection for thoſe who ſerve and are kind to us—into filial love, gratitude, friendſhip, and benevolence. Now proper ſtories exhibiting theſe feelings in action, would render the conception of them more diſtinct and more agreable: and the child would be gradually habituated to that harmony of mind which ſo much contributes to render a perſon not only good but amiable. You will find inſtances of ſuch ſtories in Mrs. Trimmer's Hiſtory of the Robins, the Children's Friend, and in Sandford and Merton.

Mr. Bewick, in one of the vignettes in his Hiſtory of Quadrupeds, where he places in the foreground two boys, rejoicing at the dying agonies of a dog which they have hanged upon a tree, and a gallows in the diſtance, has delineated an important truth. Cruelty to animals is one among the earlieſt and moſt pernicious acquiſitions of ill-educated children; and yet the ſame conſtitution of their nature, diſpoſes them to acquire the habitual ſentiment of compaſſion both for men and animals; for the cry of diſtreſs pierces the boſom of the child, and by exciting a painful ſenſation, prompts him to attempt the relief of the ſufferer! You ſee then how nature has laid the foundation of virtue in our earlieſt feelings, and how eaſy the tranſition from theſe feelings to good habits and principles.

Oppreſſion, I am aware, ſuch as is practiſed upon ſlaves and what is generally taught for religion, together with the time and manner of teaching it, ſtifle theſe benevolent tendencies: both indeed ſo far brutalize the mind and ſo entirely pervert our ſympathy as to make us feel pleaſure from the pain of our fellow-creatures. We are alſo capable, from the mere influence of evil examples, of becoming firſt callous to the torments of animals and afterwards of taking delight in them. In this caſe our love of action is led aſtray by the ſpirit of imitation. Theſe two principles are ſo ſtrong in children and of ſo ambiguous a character as to require conſtant ſuperintendance. The conduct and ſentiments of others, you know, are as it were the mould in which their conduct and ſentiments are caſt, and the very neceſſity of their nature impoſes upon them the conſtant exerciſe of their limbs. When unreſtrained by a regard to the feelings of others, this love of action degenerates into that miſchievous diſpoſition which many parents are thoughtleſs enough to encourage

courage as a mark of ſpirit. Here we may obſerve, that the malice of wits and the inhumanity of kings has the ſame origin. Surrounded as the latter always are by flattery from their cradle upwards, they learn to view the reſt of mankind as the paſſive inſtruments of their power, and conſider the waſte of human blood with much the ſame indifference as the engineer calculates the quantity of water neceſſary to ſet his machine in motion (*). Their unchecked love of action deſolates the earth at the inſtigation of ambition and vengeance. We can regard the malicious exertions of a boy with contempt as well as with abhorrence. The magnitude of the evil has hitherto conſpired with a narrow and ſlaviſh ſympathy with the powerful to prevent theſe combined ſentiments from checking the fatal bent of their activity. But reaſon has detected (†) and will in time extirpate this pernicious inſtinct.

By carefully cheriſhing this tendency to general benevolence we ſhall hinder malice from taking poſſeſſion of the breaſt. When you conſider alſo that it is deſtined to bear the fruit of active virtue, you will be diſpoſed to watch the tender plant with double vigilance. But while we exerciſe the minds of children in the contemplation of their own ſympathetic feelings, we muſt be cautious to prevent them from degenerating into the grimace of affectation. With this view we ſhould be careful to lead on their attention to beneficent exertions excited by theſe humane impulſes.

(*) Had Charles I. eſtabliſhed deſpotiſm in England, would he ever have felt a lively regret for ſigning the warrant for Strafford's execution? when ill-ſucceſs had levelled him with his condemned Miniſter, his fellow feelings were rouſed. Sympathy acts in a direction exactly contrary to the apparent direction of Gravity.

(†) Adam Smith, by demonſtrating how much ſympathy with the Great corrupts the moral ſentiments of mankind, juſtified long before-hand the abolition of the Nobleſſe by the National Aſſembly of France. See his invaluable Theory of Moral Sentiments, Vol I.

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From the proſpect afforded by a general education begun and conducted upon ſuch principles as theſe, I cannot turn my view towards the ſpirit which animates too large a portion of our fellow-citizens without a lively ſenſe of pain. Partly from the pernicious operation of our poor laws and partly from other cauſes, they are by no means, I fear, diſtinguiſhed from the inhabitants of other countries by humanity of diſpoſition. And I am ſorry to add that where the ferocious taint has been waſhed away, it has often been ſucceeded by blind fanaticiſm. Now the hiſtory of mankind ſhews too clearly how ready fanaticiſm is to form a league with violence. And if the uncharitable, excluſive ſpirit, that broods over all clans of fanatics, be not evil enough, I ſee not what ſecurity we can ever have againſt the dangerous influence of their Chieftains, whenever they ſhall be tempted to abuſe it.

But I ſhall afterwards return to the ſubject of religious impreſſions. At preſent I beg your attention for a few moments to the urgent neceſſity for humanizing the minds of the people.

Upon this the welfare of civil ſociety immediately depends: for a ſavage ſpirit in the people and tyranny in the poſſeſſors of power are to one another cauſe and effect; the tyrant's rod of iron has no other plauſible pretext; nor is it poſſible that thoſe who are cruſhed under its weight ſhould not conceive an implacable hatred againſt their oppreſſors. The current news of the preſent hour affords too ſtriking an illuſtration of theſe principles: I mean the wild devaſtations and promiſcuous maſſacres that have deſolated the Colony of St. Domingo. Theſe certainly could never have been perpetrated but by beings whom oppreſſion had diveſted of every attribute of humanity except the form. Now ſuppoſe the deſperate reſolution of the Slaves to inflict ſuch bloody vengeance upon their taſk-maſters had been diſcovered in time to take meaſures of prevention; what additional reſtraints muſt have been laid upon theſe unhappy ſufferers? how ſevere would have been the inquiſition taken by conſcious inhumanity? Thus you ſee in one extreme caſe how tyranny produces brutality, and brutality tyranical or burdenſome reſtraints. It is ſo univerſally. We have lately ſeen ſoldiers ſtationed in a neighbouring town, that had hitherto been free from that nuiſance, in order to repreſs the ſavage ſpirit of its inhabitants. Were there room

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for ſuſpecting a ſimilar diſpoſition to be general, how eaſily might a miniſter find an excuſe for the burden and danger attending a large ſtanding army. The citizens ought to learn a different leſſon in ſuch a circumſtance: they ſhould provide themſelves with arms, if it were but to avoid the abſurd injuſtice of a law which condemns them to pay for depredations which they have no adequate means of preventing. But if we have not courage and activity to adopt this great expedient for conciliating ſecurity with freedom, let us the more eagerly embrace the only alternative, and civilize the people, unleſs we chooſe to repoſe beneath the ſhadow of Bayonets in mercenary and often in brutal hands.—And now the Birmingham Rioters have preſented themſelves to my thoughts, permit me to obſerve that if a ſmall portion of human kindneſs had been infuſed into their boſoms by ſuch a mode of inſtruction, as I wiſh to ſee generally adopted among the poor, they never could have committed exceſſes ſo diſgraceful to their age and country. But I am utterly unable to conceive how READING-MADE-EASY with its endleſs repetition of godly exclamations, can inſpire any human being with benevolence towards his neighbour.

With the moral ſtories we may intermix ſelect portions of natural hiſtory, particularly deſcriptions of native plants and animals, with an account of their properties and manners. To compare the real object with the deſcription would alleviate the labour of learning and improve the habit of obſervation. In many caſes the relation between the ſtructure and functions of animals is eaſily underſtood, as in the ſtrong muſcles that move the wings of birds. Our firſt acquaintance with ſuch facts is always attended with the moſt lively ſenſe of delight, and they are ever afterwards remembered and communicated with pleaſure. Schools might eaſily be provided with ſome few obvious ſpecimens and ſimple preparations for this purpoſe; and as nothing but what is extremely palpable ſhould now be offered to the notice of children, the teachers might eaſily qualify themſelves to give ſufficient explanations.

Should you approve of this plan, you may yet be ſtartled at the idea of having materials to procure and maſters to form. Yet the difficulty would be overcome as ſoon as it ſhould be encountered; nor would it now lie in our way, if Superſtition, which has laid ſome load upon every period of life, had not,

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in its watchfulneſs to mould mankind to its purpoſes, ſeized upon us at our birth, and been ſuffered by the helpleſs ſimplicity of our parents to torture us at will. In Roman Catholic countries, where the Prieſts have perſuaded the multitude that it is ſinful to pray to God in their mother tongue, children really learn to read in latin books; and in proteſtant countries as ſoon as they have learned to read, they are forced to get by rote a papiſtical jargon, which for any thing they can underſtand of it, beyond a very few ſentences, might as well be written in latin, and which is ſo uſeleſs as to be almoſt univerſally forgotten when we ceaſe to be obliged to repeat it at ſtated times.

There are numberleſs inſtances where we perſevere in abſurd and pernicious cuſtoms from an overwhelming ſentiment of blind neceſſity, but there is none more ſignal than this. Few, I imagine, who can exert ſo much freedom of thought as to aſk themſelves, whether it would not be better to beſtow all this labour upon moral inſtruction, can heſitate to decide. In this caſe, children would ſee daily exemplified in the practice of life thoſe principles which they could eaſily comprehend when firſt explained to them. In a ſtrong ſenſe of humanity there is nothing ambiguous. It can never ſtir up animoſity or be the badge of civil diſſention. Even in the mutual ſervices of thoſe, who take delight in rehearſing the ſounds appropriated to their common Creed, there is an air of illiberality. It is not enough to be a man; your tokens of religious free-maſonry muſt be produced, before your claim to kindneſs and compaſſion can be admitted. I preſer therefore the natural bond, by which man is linked to man, to the artificial by which ſectary is linked to ſectary. I would not teach children the magic and myſterious language of thoſe tenets which diſcriminate ſects. Without great precautions it can produce no ſpecific effect except to kindle the enthuſiaſm of miſanthropy.

In the Meſſiah, Gamaliel calls religion "a ſword in the hand of the madman" and ignorance is ever liable to the paroxyſms of religious phrenzy: by ignorance I mean all belief on authority, all that has not been preceded by thought and enquiry. Along with a firm attachment to particular dogmas there will reſide in ſuch minds an habitual perſuaſion that WERE ALL MEN AS GOOD AS THEY SHOULD BE, THEY WOULD GO TO THEIR CHURCH AND BE OF THEIR COMMUNION. This fanatical diſapprobation of other men's ſentiments will quickly grow into contempt and hatred.

hatred. I need not ſay, what comes next. You know the natural progreſs of religious violence. Unleſs then, with the Hindoo teachers, we begin by declaring "that the contrarieties of religion and diverſities of belief, which are cauſes of envy and of enmity to the ignorant are in fact an evident demonſtration of the power of the ſupreme being;" that he himſelf ordained to every ſect its peculiar religion: that he views with complacency the various modes of worſhip: and is "the intimate of the Muſulman and the friend of the Hindoo: the companion of the Chriſtian and the confidant of the Jew;" unleſs we prepare the mind by ſome ſuch antidote, I cannot, when I look back upon the paſt and round upon the preſent, conſider without ſhuddering the practice of attaching the lower ranks in ſociety to any dogmas. In all ages the influence of the excluſive ſpirit in religion has been attended with the moſt odious or the moſt tremendous effects. In the ſuſpicious intervals of calm, it has contracted the heart of ſelfiſhneſs itſelf, and ſpread over ſociety a ſettled gloom of unnatural malignity. What it has been at the ſeaſons of violent eruption, you know too well already. But I wiſh ſome one would make extracts from the hiſtory of predominant ſects, ſuch as thoſe which are now in circulation from the Evidence on the ſlave-trade. The two works would deſerve to be bound together, for authority over conſcience has not been excerciſed with more lenity and is equally unfit to be entruſted to the hands of man. Maxims of benevolence however ſanctioned by the founders of religion, have had far leſs influence to expand, than this excluſive ſpirit to narrow, the human heart. The temporal welfare of mankind, I am ſure, requires charity in preference to faith, and philanthrophy rather than zeal; nor can I believe that a quiet and humane inhabitant of Earth is on this account diſqualified for becoming a denizen of Heaven. Though inconſiderate piety concur with prieſt-craft in receiving the advice with abhorence, I would recommend to inculcate with care and effect a RESPECTFUL INDIFFERENCE for the religion or irreligion of our neighbour. Let us prepare men to diſcuſs religious topics, if they chuſe to diſcuſs them, with mutual deference and to acquieſce peaceably in different concluſions.

I ſee not why we ſhould conceal from the common people the tenure by which they hold their faith: We ſhall find in this caſe alſo that honeſty is the beſt policy, and that the truth is ſalutary

tary. Let us then not ſcruple to confeſs that almoſt all men are indebted for their religion to the accident of birth: that had we ourſelves exchanged parents with a Turk or a Spaniard, we ſhould have been deeply impreſſed with a belief of the popiſh or mahometan creed.

The nations, from whom the inhabitants of Europe and the Weſtern part of Aſia are deſcended, had ſcarcely emerged from the groſſeſt barbarity at the moment they adopted that faith which they have tranſmitted to their deſcendants. They were blind idolaters and very imperfectly acquainted with the principles of morality. They therefore could not but feel the ſuperiority of the Chriſtian and Mahometan doctrines; and they adopted either indifferently as they happened in the courſe of their predatory wanderings to fall in with a Chriſtian or Mahometan nation: or if they were ſtationary ſavages, they embraced whichever of theſe two religions the arrival of more enlightened ſtrangers offered to their ignoarance.—What WE have however chiefly to dread is the fierce and rancorous hatred that ſo commonly prevails between kindred ſects. And it will not be extremely difficult to provide an antidote even for this malignant poiſon. Let us take a map and point out the political diviſions of Europe: Let us obſerve that the boundaries of kingdoms mark alſo the extent of predominant ſects: that the line for inſtance which divides Scotland from England, divides [illegible]acy from preſbyterianiſm: that the Britiſh channel ſeparates [illegible]ce from England and Popery from Proteſtantiſm, that the Pyrenean mountains which run between France and Spain part Popery without the Inquiſition, from Popery with the Inquiſition: We might carry on this proceſs through the German States. Now to theſe palpable facts let us add two others equally certain, and a plain concluſion in favour of univerſal charity will unavoidably follow. In all theſe countries there have been men who have believed that they have found in the Scriptures authority for their various creeds. The learning and abilities of theſe men have been ſo great and ſo nearly upon an equality that bigotry only or preſumption would venture to decide between them; nor will their integrity be queſtioned except by adverſaries, too deeply intereſted to be competent judges.

The other obſervation which I wiſh to have combined with the two preceding is this: there are not ſeveral different ſorts of

of truth, are calculated for an Engliſh underſtanding, one for a Scotch, a third for a Spaniard, and a fourth for a Frenchman. Indeed if there were, this would be an unanſwerable argument in favour of mutual reſpect and forbearance. But we ſee the mathematicians, the aſtronomers, and the natural philoſophers in general of theſe ſeveral countries, receiving and returning inſtruction. As ſoon as any truth is fairly proved, it is univerſally admitted; it finds no difficulty in overleaping natural and political boundaries; and we may be certain that truth of every kind, when freely ſpoken and attentively heard, will diſplay its irreſiſtable aſcendant over the human mind. Hence I infer that no deciſive arguments have yet been produced by the champions of any ſect: otherwiſe they would have produced their natural effect, general perſuaſion; and there would not be a peculiar ſyſtem of religion for every nation any more than of aſtronomy or morals.

Divines talk much to little purpoſe on the nature of evidence; for if the proofs in religion be by their nature different from what they are in ſcience, that is, weaker, they ſhould be neither ſurprized nor angry, if mankind are not convinced by them.

In fact, religious impatience is the offspring of a latent apprehenſion [redacted]—ſome fear leſt they ſhould loſe emoluments extorted from the ſuperſtition of a barbarous age—others leſt thoſe opinions, for which the leſſons of their infancy have impreſſed them with blind reverence ſhould not be able to bear a ſcrutiny. In boſoms of the moſt determined piety occaſional riſings againſt formularies of faith will be felt; but we immediately exert all our efforts to quell them, and almoſt abhor ourſelves for the commiſſion of this involuntary ſin. To thoſe who have been diſturbed by ſuch intruſions of diſquieting doubt, even the weak preſumption ariſing from an additional vote will afford conſolation; and the voice of diſſent will be the hateful cry that rouſes theſe profane ſuggeſtions from their uncertain ſlumber. Johnſon had ſeverely felt the agonies that ariſe from the conflict between doubt and duty: and his rage againſt diſſenters and infidels was produced by that foreneſs of mind which manifeſted itſelf not more in this phrenzy of zeal, than in the eagerneſs with which he ſought the balm of religious ſympathy. Can you help pitying that diſtreſs which could

could find relief in ſuch ſlender comfort? For you will doubtleſs perceive that if we are to be ſwayed by the opinions of others, the deſertion of one thinking man ſhould have more influence than the adherence of ten thouſand: We can hardly conceive that any perſon will abandon the creed in which he has been educated without ſome reſearch, reflection and compariſon: whereas the bulk of mankind continue in their attachment without having ever dreamed that this creed can poſſibly be falſe: and yet I preſume that no one ought to flatter himſelf that his conviction is rational, unleſs his doubts have been ſincere. It might have been expected, if we had not too many proofs to the contrary, that modeſty might keep thoſe who have never impartially examined their neighbour's—that is, thoſe who never doubted of their own creed—from erecting themſelves into inquiſitors of conſcience.

If a juſt ſenſe of their own blindneſs may awake a ſuſpicion in the breaſts of the illiterate that they can have no pretext for interfering between God and their Neighbour's conſcience, we may perhaps ſtrengthen the ſalutary impreſſion by another conſideration. How is it that thoſe, to whom they look up as their teachers, form their ſyſtem of opinions? Do they wander from country to country, after the example of the antient Philoſophers, and chooſe among their different doctrines thoſe which are approved by reaſon and utility? or ſince printing has diffuſed the knowledge of the ſentiments and conduct of almoſt all nations, do they pledge themſelves, after a mature deliberation at home, to diſſeminate the unbiaſſed deciſions of judgment and conſcience? Does any thing like careful enquiry precede determination? or do they prepoſterouſly give the form of aſſent to certain articles of belief, and then look out for the beſt proofs they can find? or even acquieſce without any ſubſequent ſearch and mechanically obſerve appointed forms, each piouſly believing in the infallibility of his church?

In ſhort, I ſee but two poſſible ways of eſcaping from the open and concealed miſchiefs of religious diſſention; and only one of theſe is practicable: that either all mankind agree to ſome one ſyſtem, which every enquiring perſon MUST do, as ſoon as reaſonable evidence of its truth ſhall be produced, and others will ſoon follow: or elſe that every man entertain a cordial perſuaſion that every other man is as reſpectable in his religious

religious opinions, equally acceptable to God and well diſpoſed towards his neighbour as he himſelf is in his? That any moral taint follows any ſpeculative opinions is the moſt inhuman of prejudices. It is cheriſhed in every chriſtian country, and we ſee what have been and what are its effects.

You will probably ſuſpect that this indifference to the religious ſentiments of others will damp all religious ardour and deſtroy religion itſelf. Let us not deceive ourſelves by ſounds that claim reſpect without conveying any meaning. If you cannot have faith without thinking uncharitably of your diſſentient neighbour and even without aſſaulting his conſcience—if under the pretext of maintaining religion, you invade the freedom of thought and ſpeech—the alternative is obvious: We ſhall do better without faith. Intolerance has been long univerſally diſclaimed, among us at leaſt. But reaſon is no longer ſatisfied with toleration, which more than compenſates in inſolence its ſmall deficiency of injuſtice. She demands the equal privilege of opinion, the univerſal right of conſcience; ſhe claims for rational nature the full exerciſe of its characteriſtic attributes. Let chriſtians profit by their calamitous experience: they have dealt long enough in diſcord, blood, and conflagrations: they may be content that the ſcenes of Birmingham ſhould cloſe the horrid exhibition of their church hiſtory. After their ſanguinary diſputes, they may unite to call down Philanthropy upon earth, ſince ſhe requires no ſacrifice more coſtly than the preſumption of Ignorance.

I am afraid you will think the concluſion of this letter, like that of the reign of ſeveral Jewiſh kings, has belied the fair promiſe of its beginning. Should you be impreſſed with ſuch an idea, no eloquence of mine could eraſe it: and I will not ſurely make an unavailing apology for telling what I hold to be the truth on an occaſion when it may poſſibly be uſeful. Let me rather attempt to propitiate you by what is not a very hackneyed expedient for averting the diſpleaſure of a lady. Yet if my compariſon be juſt, it may entertain you,—if not, you will be ſure to find out its deficiencies, and that would put ſome ladies into good humour with themſelves, in which caſe they are ſeldom inexorably angry with other people.—Now would it be ſo very abſurd to regard the different religious ſyſtems of civilized nations as ſo many pyramids having each a baſe, conſtructed

ſtructed of the ſame materials, diſpoſed in the ſame manner. As theſe pyramids riſe, they differ more and more in the materials and ſtyle of architecture. The common baſe conſiſts principally of the idea of an omnipotent and juſt God. All thoſe nations, I think, who have been able to give us an account of their own conceptions have diſtinctly expreſſed this ſentiment. The Majeſty of one ſupreme Being towers above a crowd of Pagan and Hindoo deities as well as over the mob of Popiſh ſaints. Theſe ſatraps, agents, meſſengers, miniſters have each his peculiar appointment under the controul of the DESPOT of nature. The material world eaſily ſupplied the notion of power; and our propenſity to ſit in judgment on our neighbour's conduct and our own—the inviſible court of conſcience—ſoon ſupplied an analogy, ſtrengthened however by viſible tribunals, which led to the idea of remunerative juſtice—and that, with ſcarce an exception, in another life. Thus man [redacted], an Heaven, and an Hell. Now in religious, which can never be totally ſeparated from moral, inſtruction, let us build up ſmall pyramids after the model of the larger ones. In raiſing theſe mental edifices we ſhould be particularly careful not to do as a modern traveller has done by certain pyramidal mountains in Abyſſinia—place them with their points downwards. Let us build the foundation firm and ſtrong of the common materials: let us arrange the univerſal morality of mankind with ſkill and order, and cement it by the univerſal principle of religion: Otherwiſe by that perverſe education, which is ſcarce in earneſt but when it is inculcating points of difference and ſowing the ſeeds of diſcord, we ſhall ſtill have nothing but crops of holy ſtrife. Our zealots were diſtinctly typified long beforehand in Cadmus raiſing a band of cut-throats from the teeth of a ſerpent. I wiſh they would ſurvey themſelves from time to time in the mirror of this parable. Pray aſk ſome friend to tranſlate the whole paſſage (Ovid. Metamorph. L. III). This viper brood, you will find, ſet to murder one another, nobody, not one among themſelves, knowing why. Fanaticiſm, it is true, does not perpetrate its maſſacres in ſilence; but poetry abhors its language as much as humanity does its practiſces. Eraſmus indeed thinks that, as Cadmus introduced letters into Greece, the paſſage alludes to literary controverſy. The poet clearly announces an evil of a very different ſtamp. He could know little of either from hiſtory or experience. Loud as the diſputing philoſophers ſometimes were, the petty nuiſance, attached

attached to the progreſs of knowledge, could not be much felt before the invention of printing. And the earth had ſcarce been ſtained by the bloody contentions of tolerating and tolerated, intolerant and perſecuted, ſects: that perennial ſource of malignant hatred, religious animoſity, had not yet ſprung up in the human breaſt.

I wiſh, Madam, that our preference for the finiſh of our own pyramid be of ſo mild and modeſt a temper, that we may bear to look upon a different ſuperſtructure without feeling an irreſiſtable impulſe to tumble it down upon our neighbour's head, and forcibly ſet our own in its place. "Away with this ſtuff, it is abominable Deiſm"—"With ſubmiſſion I conſidered Deiſm as very well in its place. Your reverence knows beſt, I have always thought the ſavage, who only worries an inoffenſive animal with his bull-dog, a gentle brute in compariſon with him, be he Biſhop, Prieſt, or Deacon, who teaches his FLOCK ſuch tricks that they cannot feed quietly in the common paſture, without falling foul upon the ſheep that have learned to bleat in a different key".

You know that many acute Philoſophers have condemned a large majority of our ſpecies to the ſervitude of perpetual prejudice. They think that however their notions may change, they can never improve; and that, whether heathens or chriſtians, they muſt always harbour in their minds a groſs mythology and be ever inſenſible to the force of moral obligation. For my part I ſhall believe, till the trial has been made, that this is either ignorance or calumny of human nature. I am abundantly ſenſible of the evils that ariſe from the fanaticiſm and brutality of the common people; and I am equally perſuaded that theſe horrible qualities themſelves originate in the wretched condition of governments. Hitherto, Madam, our political ſyſtems have been no better than our phyſical were a few centuries ago. It was eaſier to diſcover the relations that ſubſiſt between the planets, than thoſe which ought to ſubſiſt between human beings. When the ſanguinary glory of conqueſts and the ruinous ſplendour of foreign poſſeſſions ſhall be renounced, when men ſhall be wiſe enough ſo to correct their political inſtitutions, that the united ſtrength of nations may be employed in improvements at home inſtead of deſtruction abroad, a well-digeſted ſyſtem of public inſtruction will ſecure the peace of ſociety more effectually than the gallows and the bayonet. Our GAZETTES EXTRAORDINARY, I allow, have a ſublimity beyond the

the ſtrains of Homer and Virgil. I fully ſympathiſe with my countrymen in the pleaſure of drenching the ſoil of Aſia and America with Britiſh and foreign blood: the peruſal of theſe our heroic Gazettes, is, I am ſenſible, cheaply purchaſed by the payment of a few taxes and by the privation of ſome ſlight gratifications, which, but for them, every man might procure to himſelf and to his family. Whenever the glory of the Britiſh arms riſes before my imagination I feel the genuine glow of patriotiſm. AND THRICE I SLAY THE SLAIN. I own, and it has always been the opinion of our wiſe and beneficent governors, that a country cultivated like a garden, an induſtrious, humane, and peaceful people, cities and towns provided with gratuitous ſchools, public libraries, baths, and every poſſible accomodation for rich and poor, had been a paltry object in compariſon with gazettes full of marches and countermarches, wounds and death, retreats, flights and captivities, once or twice, in ten years of war, a naval victory, and every week, to keep the people in ſpirits, a merchant-man captured by a pirate, called a privateer. Neither without this glory ſhould we cut ſuch a figure in hiſtory: to be ſure, the former advantages would laſt much longer; they would be more univerſally felt: they would coſt much leſs money, and only ſweat inſtead of blood. They would promote public happineſs both in the preparation and enjoyment. But our miniſters and parliaments have been intent upon higher concerns. They know that Glory is both meat and drink to your true Engliſhman. We could not have exiſted without thoſe trophies that diſtinguiſh the reign of George III. from that of Antoninus Pius.

We have one peculiar advantage. Opinion has fortunately eſtabliſhed among us a POLITICAL RELIGION. We can all repeat our conſtitutional, much better than our church, catechiſm, and in the ſame parrot ſtyle. And why ſhould we diſtreſs ourſelves with doubt, or puzzle ourſelves with enquiry? All the world knows and we feel that we are now the choſen people. Of courſe queſtions like the following are quite ſuperfluous: 1. Whether there be any neceſſary connection between the ſpecific form of our political ſyſtem and the proſperity of agriculture and manufactures? whether they have not flouriſhed under very different ſyſtems, and would not flouriſh more with us, if ſuch and ſuch changes were to take place? 2. Whether within the laſt twenty years, not to go go farther back, our

our conſtitution has not permitted our miniſters and parliaments to fall into ſome ſmall miſtakes? whether and how it will prevent ſuch miſtakes in future? whether we muſt not all go juſt as a miniſter drives? 3. How long it will be before the induſtry of individuals will redeem the conſequences of theſe miſtakes? for our miniſters and parliaments are like the lilies of the field: they neither ſpin nor weave. Theſe choice ſpirits poſſeſs indeed an admirable noſtrum for relieving plethoric purſes. And it is pretty well for them to ſpend what men of narrower ſouls and coarſer hands acquire. 4. Whether the trade of Venice, Portugal, &c. was not once, in proportion, as flouriſhing as the Britiſh? whether theſe ſtates have not, in the hour of their proſperity, cruſhed as many diſtant countries, ruined, oppreſſed, ſtarved, and butchered as many millions of their fellow-creatures? and why then, not enjoying the bleſſings of the Britiſh Conſtitution, they could poſſibly rival us both in the glory of Commerce and of Cruelty? Highly as we think of ourſelves, we have hardly yet exceeded the Spaniards in the laſt reſpect, but we may live in hopes. A few more exterminating wars in India: and we ſhall match them. 5. Whether this country flouriſhes by virtue or in ſpite of its conſtitution? 6. Whether this fever of conqueſt may not terminate here as elſewhere in the languor of ſlow decay?

A book written by one of our orthodox politicians, a gentleman of nerves as tremulous as calves-feet-jelly, now ſupports my ink-ſtand. He has ſeated himſelf as judge and jury on the life of at leaſt four-and-twenty millions of men, women, and children, and has ſentenced the "largeſt part" to fire and ſword for not adopting the Britiſh Conſtitution, and certain great perſonages ſeem diſpoſed to execute his ſentence of extermination, though they diſapprove of the Britiſh Conſtitution ten times more than theſe poor offenders. To be ſure as they are only French, there would be no great harm in cutting their throats, only our ſoldiers would want ſome enemy to keep them in wind, when they ſhall have extirpated the Myſorean Tyrant together with thouſands of his ſubjects, burned a few more villages belonging to our warmeſt friend and ally the Corgar Rajah, plundered and diſperſed the poor women and children, while their fathers and huſbands were opportunely abſent, fighting for us againſt Tippoo. At the ſame time I am ſorely concerned for this gentleman's friends, the Americans, who have equally

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ſinned againſt the Britiſh Conſtitution, and can ſtill leſs plead ignorance in mitigation of the ſentence. This ſtateſman may have another reaſon, beſides the mere zeal he profeſſes for the good of mankind, for preaching up a political cruſade. He may look upon it as a part of the Ways and Means for ridding the world of what Shakeſpear calls "the cankers of a quiet world and a long peace". At all events he has fully diſplayed his amiable diſpoſition. If he had but the ſword and the arm of the Exterminating Angel, we may be ſure he would purify the earth at a few ſtrokes from that miſchievous vermin, the French and the Philoſophers.

We will now, if you pleaſe, quit this Conſtitution-Politician and his cruſade for thoſe, whom we do not deſire to become either religious or political cruſaders. It is not enough that our plan form a humane diſpoſition in children and inſinuate principles proper to regulate their conduct. We muſt alſo confer the habit, and teach ſome arts, of induſtry. Our pupils muſt be able to procure a maintenance leſt they ſhould be expoſed to the temptations of want. Is it an illuſion of the imagination, or may the combination of labour with inſtruction diſſipate the gloom that ſo generally broods over ſcools, and render inſtruction chearful? Allow me to purſue this romantic idea. Suppoſe we have ſixty ſcholars, a ſchool-room, a working-room, a ſmall garden adjacent, and a ſchool-miſtreſs as well as a maſter. This ſhould be our ſyſtem. Ten of the ſcholars ſhould apply to reading and writing, while the others, who ſhould ſucceed in their turn, are employed in ſewing, ſpinning, making bird-cages, baſkets, in ſhort, in ſome manufacture ſuitable to their age and ſex. While at work, the miſtreſs ſhould encourage and ſupport a converſation, calculated to fix the favourable impreſſions, we ſuppoſe them to derive from books. Such converſations might powerfully ſtimulate the leſs advanced and habituate them to that ſort of reflection which applies itſelf to the ordinary affairs of life, and conſtitutes plain practical ſenſe. In bad weather we ſuppoſe them to work in the room. The contributions of the charitable will lay in an original ſtock of materials. At ſtated times there might be a ſale of the articles, which I hope wouldbe well attended, or they might go to market. The money ſhould be laid out in freſh ſtock, only part of the profit ſhould be given to the child who had manufactured the articles, and, when ſufficiently accumulated, ſhould be laid out

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for him in ſomething that would pleaſe him as well as be of uſe to him: another part ſhould be given to the maſter and miſtreſs, who would then make thoſe exertions to which people are excited by contingent profits. Perhaps it would be prudent to take a ſmall portion from the whole profit, as a fund for buying prizes for thoſe who make the quickeſt progreſs in reading and writing. We can eaſily vary the project in twenty different ways. But what do you think of it?—You ſhake your head.—Do not be too diſtruſtful, however; It is not a project, but a deſcription. The ſcheme has been ſucceſsfully reduced to practice for ten years at leaſt, if I remember right. It has ſupported itſelf in various parts of Germany. You will find that good ſenſe alſo ſuggeſted ſimilar ideas to thoſe, who planned that POOR-HOUSE, which does ſo much honour to the town of Shrewſbury and has conferred ſuch ſubſtantial advantages upon the inhabitants. They have indeed, and perhaps they could not do otherwiſe, made ſome ſacrifices to thoſe eſtabliſhed abſurdities which I have endeavoured to expoſe.

I hope you will think this plan worth examination, You will judge of its plauſibility, and you ſee what experience it has in its favour. I cannot at preſent offer you any more deciſive proofs of its beneficial tendency. It would be worth the trial, if it promiſed no more than to render ſchools leſs like gaols.

Inſtead of the language of unmeaning complaiſance, I will take my leave with a ſincere wiſh for the proſperity of that little inſtitution which occaſioned theſe reflections. No common occurrence would gratify me more than to hear, that I had contributed an hint, capable of promoting the benevolent views of the founder. I do not undoubtedly expect that you ſhould aſſent to all my obſervations, or be convinced by all my reaſonings. I hope however YOU will meet with nothing in this letter to excite ſuch ſenſations in your breaſt as one may imagine a BRAMIN to feel, who, on recovering from a reverie, ſhould find himſelf eating animal food, or a RABBI, who has unwarily touched ſome UNCLEAN THING. Horror at newly diſcovered truth, or if you pleaſe, at inquiries that advance beyond the beaten track of vulgar opinion, is an appearance ſo familiar that I wonder we have not ſome appropriate term, analogous to HYDROPHOBIA, to expreſs it. To moſt ears the firſt cry of Reaſon is and always has been intolerable. I am truly ſorry for it. But ſhall we, according to Swift's phraſe, put

a gag into her mouth. in order to get rid of her importunities? Before you condemn her to ſilence, look back upon her former ſervices, and conſider what would have been the ſtate of mankind, if her remonſtrances had been always ſtifled? Should we have been at this day the abject ſlaves of Papal ſuperſtition and Feudal tyranny? or would our condition have been ſtill more deplorable? "But every thing is now happily ſettled; and the audacity of "modern diſcuſſion, which leaves nothing is unexamined, is not "merely unneceſſary: it is miſchievous." Such, Madam, was in all ages the joint cry of bigotry, of privileged corporations, and of ignorance, when the beſt benefactors of mankind arraigned any flagrant abuſe before the tribunal of the public. Without depreciating active virtue, I may venture to call philoſophers, the lovers and ſeekers of truth, the beſt benefactors of mankind; for the ſphere of the former is neceſſarily confined. But to expoſe one error of practice, or to eſtabliſh one ſalutary principle, is to render a ſervice, unlimited both as to extent and duration. We bluſh when we recollect the treatment, which thoſe, who have eventually delivered us from the evil of deſpotiſm and error, received at the hands of our anceſtors. But let us not deceive ourſelves. They would not experience a kinder welcome from us. The fate of the Prophets of old, is ſtill reſerved for thoſe who make the beſt uſe of their rational faculties, though they do not alarm our pride by menaces or by pretenſions to perſonal authority. Stupidity is ſtill unſuſpicious of the force of the temptation, and muſt therefore be ſtill incapable of forgiving the ſin of thoſe who reaſon. Bigotry, though not ſo powerful, is ſtill relentleſs: and the inſtinct of Superſtition is ſtill tremblingly alive to real or imaginary danger. The HORROR OF ENQUIRY will yet continue ſtrong for half a century. And Perſecution, though it may occaſionally break forth into open violence, will chiefly travel about, like a Brief, whiſpering defamation from houſe to houſe. Another LOCKE would only furniſh another example of human folly and ingratitude, This is a melancholy proſpect: but we may conſole ourſelves by reflecting that the ſpirit of a LOCKE is now leſs likely than ever to be repreſſed by the diſpleaſure of Colleges and Biſhops, the murmurs of ignorance or the fury of fanaticiſm.

THOMAS BEDDOES.

JANUARY 25, 1792.

ERRATA.

Page 11, Line 37, for 'acquieſſce' read 'acquieſce'.
—— 13, —— 1, for 'are' read 'one'.
—— 16, ——37, for 'practiſees' read 'practices,.
—— 16, —— 16, correct 'Thus man diſcovered a God, and created an Heaven and an Hell.'
—— 19, —— 35—40, This ſhocking fact, though it has not appeared in the London Gazette, is true. The expeſſions are thoſe of the Commander in Chief himſelf, Abercrombie.

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